

LYME DISEASE: IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU

A fellow superintendent's trials with the "great imitator"

Lyme disease, because of its ability to mimic a wide variety of other illnesses, has been dubbed the "great imitator". And few people know that better than Superintendent Dave Pijnenburg (Redding Country Club in Redding, CT), whose symptoms were misdiagnosed until the disease had reached its more debilitating, later stages.

What follows is an account of his ordeal with the disease—a story he hopes will spare others from serious complications that can arise when the Lyme disease bacterium—*Borrelia burgdorferi*—isn't treated promptly. By the way, Dave never spotted the offending tick or the telltale rash that frequently warns people they've been infected.

Last July, while I was preparing the golf course for our annual member-guest tournament, I started feeling exhausted in the afternoons. At first, I shrugged it off, figuring it was because I'd been putting in a lot of long hours.

Wrong. Two weeks after the tournament has passed, I felt even weaker. I'd go home around 11 am and take a two-hour nap, just so I could make it through the day. I went to the hospital; they ran all kinds of test but couldn't come up with anything. Their diagnosis: Probable virus. Their prescription: Get plenty of rest.

The next week, I began having constant headaches and dizzy spells, I almost passed out at the wheel one afternoon. I went back to the hospital. This time they took spinal fluid to check for meningitis or Lyme disease. Once again, their test came back negative. They gave me aspirin for my headache and told me to take it easy for a while.

By the beginning of September, I felt extremely weak. Then, just after Labor Day, I woke up and the left side of my face was numb. I returned to the hospital, and after another spinal tap, I was diagnosed as having Lyme disease.

Because the disease was now in a later stage, I was admitted to the hospital and put on intravenous antibiotics. The next day, the right side of my face and body was paralyzed. I couldn't move my lips or blink my eyes.

After four days, I was released from the hospital and given a new antibiotic—Ceftriaxone—to take once a day for 14 days. My health slowly improved, and by the end of October, I had regained full control of my facial muscles.

I've been in good health since, but I do have to go back to the hospital every three months to be sure I haven't had a relapse—one of the hazards of having contracted Lyme disease.

After all this, I can't emphasize enough that prevention is the best medicine for Lyme disease. Educate your employees. Now's a good time to start. Because we had a mild winter, ticks are bound to be more plentiful and active this year. With that in mind, here are some tips that will help you and your crew guard against this serious health threat.

If you're going to be working around wooded or tall-grass areas on the course:

- *Wear light-colored clothing so ticks will be more visible.
- *Tuck your pant legs into your socks or boots and your shirt into your pants.
- *Tape the area where your pants and socks meet to keep ticks from crawling under your clothing.
- *Spray your pants, socks, and shoes with an insect repellent. Those containing DEET (diethyltoluamide) will repel ticks for hours. Permanone is a new insecticide that kills ticks on contact. Unlike DEET, Permanone cannot be applied to skin and it's not approved in all states. Check your body and clothes for ticks throughout the day.

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